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ABSTRACT

A semester-long unit on African art and culture for high school art students is presented. The unit is comprised of 12 lessons. Lessons one, two, and three examine the concept of the artist as a close observer. Students examine their attitudes about Africa, view filmstrips which depict early African art and sculpture, recreate an African sculpture with pen and ink, and create a collage of a map of Africa. Lessons four through six examine the artist as communicator. Students investigate the role of African artists in their society, describe in writing an African sculpture, "The Primordial Couple," and analyze symbols in African masks. Lessons seven through twelve analyze the artist as creator. Students create an art object that can be used culturally and aesthetically, compare slides of African crafts with those of modern crafts, plan a program on African music and dance, and visit an art museum. Lesson twelve, an art practicum in which the students spend the remainder of the semester (10 weeks) crafting their art projects, culminates in an art show which includes music and dance. A selected bibliography of books, periodicals, films, filmstrips, slides, and photographs is included. (KC)

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"AFRICAN ART AND CULTURE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS OF ART"

An Instructional Unit for Tenth through Twelfth Grade Art

by

Enid Britton

Dunlap High School

Dunlap, Illinois

This teaching unit on Africa was developed as part of an interdisciplinary workshop project in African curriculum development held on the University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign campus in the summer of 1979. The workshop project, which was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, was carried out from 1977-80 and was integrated into an on-going program of outreach services offered to teachers nationwide. For further information on teaching aids available through outreach services, contact:

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African Studies Program
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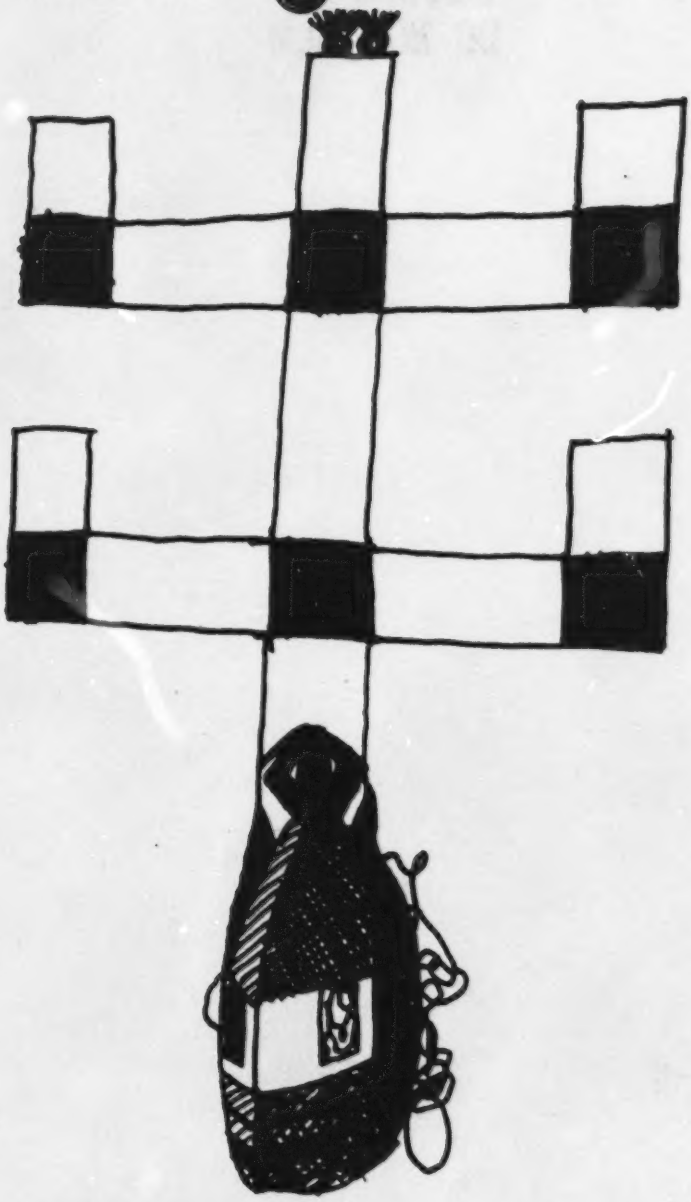
SP 012 703

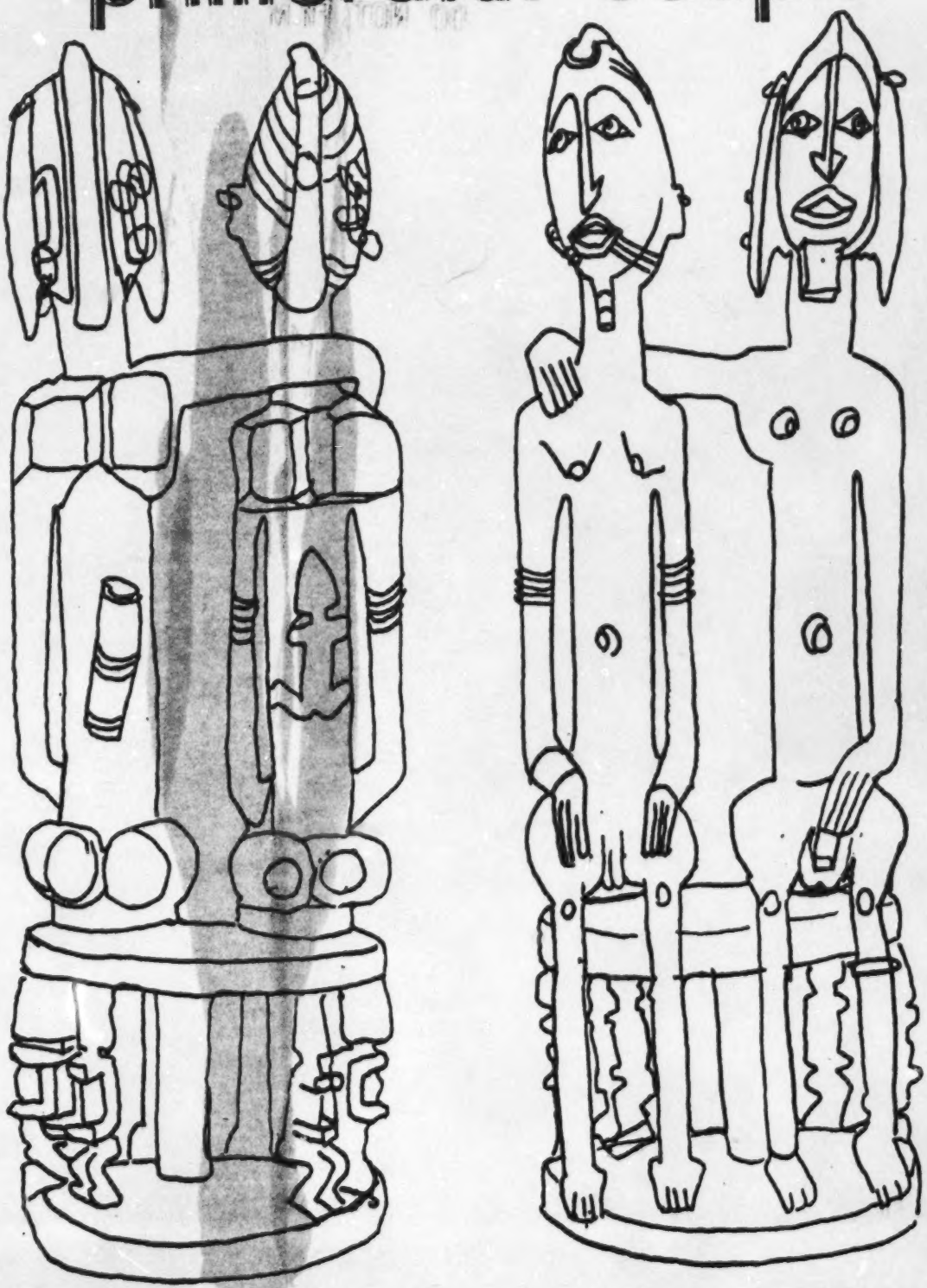
AFRICAN STUDIES

beaded crown yoruba

kanaga mask



primordial couple



1. Preface Statement

The task of the art teacher is three-fold. The easiest task is the teaching of a process with its need for practice to attain skills. We could compare this task to the teaching of typing, basic piano, spelling and sentence construction.

The second problem in art education is to teach the use of the creative mind. This task is most complex. It requires strategies like coaching a winning team requires a kind of "game plan." It is in this area that the use of outside material can "make" or "break" a unit on art. Students come to us with a dominance of the intellect in European art established in the Renaissance. To test this statement ask a number of people to name a famous artist and you will find more often than not the layman will mention a Rennaissance artist. It is important to try to redress the balance of the intellect and the intuition. Western artists have greatly benefited from their encounter with the immense range of exploration of form and design by African art. This art has led to the creation of new forms in western art. I trust that a study of African art by my students will lead them to a more intuitive approach to their projects.

The third task of the art teacher is, in the long run, probably the most important. It has to do with aesthetic pleasure. Experts agree that the normal man has, because of his biological and psychological makeup, the ability to recognize and to enjoy ideality of form. It is important for the unit to successfully advance this cause. The art work of the students themselves must be of high quality and properly finished, mounted, and hung on public display. If we have successfully freed the creative spirit, the students will experience aesthetic pleasure at this display. As Joyce Cary says, "The common case of the original artist is that he wants not only to express his unique idea of things, but to communicate it. He is, in fact, almost invariably a propogandist, he is convinced that his idea of things is true and important and he wants to convert others, to change the world."[1] This creative pleasure can be directed at the enjoyment of his classmates' work as well as his own. It is at this point that we test our agreements on what makes something beautiful to look at.

If the teacher fails in any one of these tasks, the student fails to achieve the kind of artistic experience which will enrich his life.

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[1] Joyce Cary, Art and Reality, Harper and Brothers, N.Y., 1958. p.91.

2. Grade Level and Course

Art II may consist of sophomores, juniors and seniors who have completed Art I prior to signing up for this course. The first semester is devoted to soft design which includes rug-making, weaving, stitchery, basket-making, macrame, 3-D stuffed projects, applique, reverse applique, and/or a combination of any of these OR aluminum cast sculpture.

The unique problem in this class is that the Art II, Art III and Art IV students are all together in the classroom. This means that films or slides which may be appropriate for one group may not be appropriate for the other two. In choosing such aids it is necessary to present a broad enough selection so that ideas for projects of all three groups may be included. African art is well suited to this diversity.

The problem of varying class levels is also ameliorated by the fact that artists generally need to collect a store of ideas in the form of drawings from which their ideas for specific projects may be obtained. These drawings may be done in such a way as to best forward the project at hand. Nevertheless, the inspiration for these drawings may contain similar subject matter whether they will be used for sculpture, printing, or textile projects.

We will devote the first five weeks to the initial collecting of these ideas and the execution of these five drawings.

3. Instructional Objectives

3.1. The use and development of the creative mind

a. To study in reasonable depth the art of another culture, so that the art of our own culture will be better understood.

b. To point out that other aspects of African life besides art--language, science, and other areas of knowledge--had impact on the world.

3.2. Concepts

a. To better understand the revolt against tradition in modern art by studying in some depth the art of African cultures.

b. To understand that a work of art has different realities; one we can see, another we can feel, and still another which is the inner life of the art creation--Picasso's idea that a painting achieves its own life once the artist has finished it.

c. To learn to communicate an idea through one's own art work without the use of language.

d. To learn how African artists fit into their societies, how they learn their arts, how their creations are used and how the arts are intertwined with one another and ingrained in the various cultures.

3.3. Skills

a. To learn new skills, e.g. weaving, warping, stitchery techniques, quilting, applique, reverse applique, batik, tie and dye, trapunto, tapestry weaving and sculpting, sand-casting, polishing, packing and pouring.

b. To realize the effort involved in handcrafting in some of the oldest ways known to mankind.

c. To learn to closely observe an art object and be able to describe it in language.

d. To learn to closely observe an art object and draw it accurately. An artist observes best through drawing.

e. To learn to "read" an art object and make the correlation between symbol and meaning as it is expressed in African art; analysis.

f. To dispel any misconceived notions or myths about African art: "child-like," "primitive," etc.

g. To learn Africa from an "inside" view by actually attempting to create an art project which can be used in a cultural sense as well as displayed for its aesthetic sense.

h. To give the art show an African cultural flavor.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the African unit in Art II will be two-fold. First, the study of the art and culture of Africa will add an excitement and newness to the art studio the students know so well. There will be the opportunity to create an environment in the studio by decorating the bulletin boards with pictures of African art, by draping African tie-dye cloth in the showcase, by displaying books filled with African art throughout the room, and by playing African music. This environment should stimulate the students to ask questions and want to learn more about the culture of Africa. In the series of introductory experiential lessons, each lesson will build on the last so that at the end the student should have a new attitude about African culture and the art it produced. This new attitude should enable the student to better understand his own culture and the art he is producing. The second purpose of the unit will be to reinforce the three concepts taught last year about the role of the artist. It will be important to point out that these concepts hold for the African artist just as much as they did for the European artists we studied last year, and that the concepts are valid for the student artist as well:

A. The artist is a close observer (Lessons one, two and three).

B. The artist communicates (Lessons four through six).

C. The artist is creative (Lessons seven through twelve).

Regardless of what medium the students choose, what skills they learn, or what subject they choose, the role of the artist is constant.

After we have built a new understanding of African culture, the students will be asked to use this new viewpoint in the creation of a major project which will take the rest of the semester to complete. The classroom will become a working studio in which a variety of African crafts will be learned. No one student will learn all of the skills being taught; each student will develop a project which is different and unique; and yet, all of the projects will develop under the framework set up by the first eleven lessons.

LESSON ONE: DAY 1

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out if students have any misconceived notions or myths about Africa.
2. To gather materials for later use in finding out if students have changed their opinions as a result of this unit.
3. To begin to better understand the art of our own culture by studying in reasonable depth the art of another culture.
4. To point out that other aspects of African life besides art--language, science, and other areas of knowledge--had impact on the world.

Skills:

a. Note-taking

b. Active listening and watching

IMPLEMENTATION

Part I

Students will take a pre-test which will reflect their attitudes about Africa before our six-lesson series on Africa. A post-test is planned for the end of the unit. The teacher will collect the first series of responses and save them until the second test is given. At this time the first test will be handed out and the students will be able to compare the answers. Students will be asked to point out some of the changes in attitude on the second set of responses.

(Attitude test included on p. 6)

Part II

The first two film strips in the series "African Art and Culture" (Warren Schloat Productions, Inc., Pleasantville, NY) will be shown:

Part 1. History and early art--points out how impressive the city of Timbuktu was to the first European visitors there.

Part 2. Sculpture--some of the characteristics of African art are discussed, i.e. large head size in proportion to body size, protuding navel, closed eyes, open mouths full to teeth, etc.

After the film showing, students will compare their notes with a set of brief model-notes.

EVALUATION

The evaluation of this lesson will occur when the students compare the drawing they will do for the next lesson with the notes they have taken from this filmstrip about the characteristics of the forms of African sculpture.

AFRICA

Complete these sentences as rapidly as possible, using the first idea or phrase that comes to you.

1. Africa is

2. African people are

3. When I hear the word Africa I think of

4. Africans probably think America is

5. Africans probably think Americans are

6. Some things I know about Africa are

7. I would like to go to Africa because

8. I would not like to go to Africa because

LESSON TWO: DAYS 2-4

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn to closely observe an art object and be able to draw it accurately. An artist observes best through drawing.

2. To arouse the student's curiosity as to why the forms are as they are: large heads, short legs, protruding navels, etc.

Skills

1. to learn to draw what they see

2. to develop drawing with pen and ink using textures to indicate value changes

IMPLEMENTATION

Pictures, slides, and if possible, a real African sculpture will be made available for the students to use to complete their drawings. It will be important to guide the students into choosing some of the sculptures which clearly illustrate the large heads, short legs, protruding navels, etc. that are discussed in the film strip, although it is not necessary that each drawing show all of these characteristics.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

The students will be asked to choose from available books, pictures, or projected slides, an African sculpture to draw as exactly as possible. Students may use tracing paper, grid enlargement techniques, or the opaque projector as aids. Drawings will be finished by using pen texture techniques.

The drawings will be displayed on the bulletin board. The class will be asked to point out the drawings which clearly show some of the African characteristics discussed in the film and listed in their notes.

LESSON THREE: DAYS 5-9

OBJECTIVES

1. Man is a product of his environment; culture is man's adaptation to his environment; art is an expression of this culture.*

2. To learn to communicate an idea through one's own art work without the use of language.

Skills

1. To portray without the use of language some information about the African continent.

2. To discover by drawing a map of the African continent some of the geographical features: lack of natural harbors, limited navagation possibilities of the rivers, lack of a unified railroad system, size of desert areas, limited area of rain forest, land-locked countries, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION

A slide of the continent of Africa will be displayed. This map has no writing on it. Different colors do indicate the elevations. The teacher will discuss the ecology of tropical Africa from the lecture by James Karr. Three handouts will be given to the students showing the railway systems, the population density, the navigable waterways. Other atlas information will be available in the art room. See Appendix I "Maps."

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

The students will be asked to create a collage using the African map as the basic element and magazine pictures as a source for color and texture. This collage should "tell" something about Africa. No words may be used.

With a magic marker the students are to superimpose the ink drawing on this collage.

EVALUATION

Discuss the success of this two-part assignment in terms of communication without language. Raise the question of a culture which has no written language. Have the students try to "read" the information other students have included in their collages.

YOU HAVE NOW COMBINED ONE IDEA - THE AFRICAN CONTINENT - WITH A SECOND IDEA - AN AFRICAN SCULPTURE: WHAT IS THE NEW IDEA THAT IS PRESENTED WITH THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO?*

LESSON FOUR: DAY 10

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn how African artists fit into their societies, how they learn their arts, how their creations are used, and how the arts are intertwined with one another and ingrained in the various cultures.

2. By studying in some depth the art of African culture which is in accord with the artists' tradition, we can better achieve an understanding of the revolt against tradition of modern art.

Skills

1. The students will be asked to take brief notes, to watch for unsubstantiated claims (for example, exaggerated judgements on Dogon art).

2. The students will be asked to listen and watch actively, to watch for pejorative language (the use of "tribe" and "primitive" for example).

IMPLEMENTATION

"The Bend of the Niger" will be shown. See description, See Appendix II. At the end of the showing the role of the artist will be discussed. In what way does the intrusion of the camera affect the validity of the presentation? How does the music fit into the cultural context? In what way does the dance fit into the cultural context? Can the mask worn by the dancers mean the same thing to: a person seeing the mask in a museum? a person who has collected the art and displays it in his living room? a person who is an African of the Dogon culture participating in the masquerade? a person of another culture viewing the masquerade? Bring up the problem of the sterile presentation of art work in our art show. Try to get the students to suggest that the show could be improved by the addition of music and dance.

ACTIVITIES

The students will participate in the discussion of the above questions. The students will be asked to consider whether an artist who reproduces the identical mask form again and again is being creative, and to consider whether modern African artists would be willing to limit themselves to the traditional forms in art.

EVALUATION OF THE LESSON

If the students suggest that our art show include music and dance, the lesson will be a success.

LESSON FIVE: DAY 11

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn to closely observe an art object and be able to describe it in written language.

2. To learn to closely observe an art object and make the correlation between symbol and meaning as it is expressed in African art; analysis.

3. To dispel any misconceived notions or myths about African art: "childlike," "primitive," etc.

Skills

1. To learn to be observant.

2. To be able to describe in words a work of art.

IMPLEMENTATION

Present each student with the handout, Primordial Couple.* Display the colored slide of the Primordial Couple. Give the students fifteen minutes to write a description of the sculpture. Collect the student papers. Read the description of the Primordial Couple taken from the book African Art of the Dogon. The teacher will lead a discussion of the sophistication of meaning as expressed in the sculpture. The students will be led to conclude that the sculpture is far from "childlike" in its meaning.

The slide that we studied last year of the European couple in their bedroom by an unknown artist will be shown. The students will be reminded or asked to remember the symbolism in this painting: the dog, shoes off, holding hands, all dressed up yet in their bedroom, mirror, candle, etc.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

The students will describe in writing the sculpture: the Primordial Couple. They will then discuss their success in reading the meaning of the symbols. The students will make notes of the significant symbols on their handouts. The students will be led to dispel the notion that African art is "primitive" or "childlike."

EVALUATION

The descriptions will be evaluated on the basis of the number of significant symbols they were able to pick out and describe.

*See appendix III for full description of Primordial Couple.

DISCUSSION OF THE PRIMORDIAL COUPLE

The object of this discussion is to encourage you to look at the sculpture from the point-of-view of the artist who made it.

This is not a Kanaga mask which was reproduced in a nearly identical manner again and again as the masks wore out or were broken in the masquerade.

This is an altar piece that was to be displayed along with other cultural objects in what might be called a shrine.

It would be given special care, and housed where it would be protected from being broken or weathered.

It would last longer because of this care. It would be handed down from generation to generation.

Something special must have happened to warrant the fine carving lavished on this object.

SPECULATION: This may have been a special commission after a war to encourage people to accept one another in peace.

The artist has chosen to:

show the male organs in a more restrained manner instead of the tumescent manner of may African sculptures; show the female breasts in a less fecund manner.

Why? Sex is played down...

an older couple portrayed? Even though the couple look young, we remember that Africans usually choose to portray youth even when they are depicting old people.

to add to the peaceful and serene attitude of the couple? If each represent one of the warring peoples, this could portray peaceful coexistance.

The sculpture could easily have appeared obscene to the Western eye but there is a certain niceity in the carving of the hands of the male, one on his genital the other on the woman's breast--it shows a sensitivity on the part of the artist (who would traditionally have been a man) for the part the female plays in the perpetuation of the species...a certain regard...a certain respect ...a sense of responsibility willingly assumed.

Look at the backs of the sculpture.

The woman has a baby on her back which defines her role in society.

The man has a quiver which makes him a hunter, a provider, perhaps a warrior.

All this is done with such exquisite restraint. I love the slight turn of the female head.

How would it change the character of the couple if both figures were faced directly forward?

Robert F. Thompson (African Art in Motion) suggests that a seated pose implies permanence, calm, and character, a seated person as an honored guest. The supporting figures suggest stability, strong power, the witnessing of truth.

THE IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT AN INTELLIGENT HUMAN BEING WAS MAKING ALL THESE CHOICES AS HE CONCEIVED AND CARVED THIS SCULPTURE.

LESSON SIX: DAY 12

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn how African artists fit into their societies, how they learn their arts, how their creations are used and how the arts are intertwined with one another and ingrained in the various cultures.

2. To learn to "read" an art object and make the correlation between symbol and meaning as it is expressed in African art: analysis.

Skills

1. To observe closely

2. To make correlations between symbols and meaning

IMPLEMENTATION

The students will be presented with the handout, Kanaga Mask.* After reading the philosophy of spiral and checkerboard, the students will be asked to write a short paper on what they see in the mask that correlates with the symbols used in the mask and what they remember of the dance sequences shown in the film, The Bend of the Niger.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Students will make correlations between the ideas as expressed in the information about spirals and checkerboards as used in Dogon culture with the picture of the Dogon Mask.

EVALUATION

Students should at least be able to pick out the checkerboard and zig-zag in the mask.

*See Appendix IV, Kanaga Mask

LESSON SEVEN: DAYS 13-18

OBJECTIVES

1. To learn African art from an "inside" view by actually attempting to create an art project which can be used in a cultural sense as well as displayed for its aesthetic sense.

2. To get students to communicate their own culture through art. To help them understand what culture is in this sense. To help them realize that art is a part of their everyday lives and not something to lock away in a museum; just as the Dogon culture is reflected in the Dogon art, their culture can be reflected in their art.

Skills

1. To learn to select material for an art project which will be appropriate.

2. To learn to draw from "life."

IMPLEMENTATION

The students will be asked to make a list of the "visuals" they might present if they were a TV producer trying to characterize the life of the teenager in this community. Ask them to be specific, to use their own personal life as a basis for these visuals--not a car but the car they drive, not a house but the front door of their house. From this list they are to select those visual memories that would best lend themselves to a composition. This selection might be based on color, action, texture, opportunity for repetition, interest, etc. They should then go out and draw these visuals to bring to class. A number of common objects for visuals will be collected on a table for the students to begin drawing in class: telephone, box of Tide, beer can, Adidas shoe, tooth brush, some advertisements.

The students will be asked to use a Christmas bulb and draw their own image as seen in this round mirror surface.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

After collecting a number of drawings the students will select three to five to arrange together to create a composition. They will then cut out their self-portrait and place it in the composition.

EVALUATION OF THE LESSON

Students will display their work and try to "read" the culture and personality of the artist by what each has chosen to include in the composition. This exercise can be fun.

LESSON EIGHT: DAY 19

OBJECTIVES

1. By studying African culture we can understand that a work of art has different realities; one we can see, another we can feel, and still another which is the inner life of the art creation--Piccasso's idea that a painting achieves its own life once the artist has finished it.

Skills

1. To visualize in the mind what a major project might look like.

2. To understand better how a new idea can be incorporated into an art work. To clarify the difference between copying and being inspired by art of another artist.

IMPLEMENTATION

The teacher has prepared a number of slides which illustrate African inspiration for modern textile projects. These eleven slides will be shown and discussed. The teacher will point out the similarities and differences in the compositions. Included in the slides will be examples of African wood sculpture and modern stuffed sculpture; African patchwork and modern patchwork; African Beaded crowns and modern stuffed sculpture; African batik and modern batik; African weaving and modern weaving.

The students will be asked to consider how their map assignment might be adapted to a textile project and how their teenage culture project might be adapted into a textile project.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Students must now begin to seriously consider the project that they want to undertake as their semester's work. This discussion will focus their minds on this necessity.

LESSON NINE: DAY 20

OBJECTIVES

1. Enrichment program

Skills

1. To learn how to be gracious hosts.

IMPLEMENTATION

Invite Phyllis Afriyie-Opoku to present a program on African music and dance to our students.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Students will be responsible for planning the program and inviting the music students to join us.

EVALUATION

Meeting a real African student will enrich the program on African art. This experience will take the discussions out of the abstract realm of thought and bring the fact that we have been studying real people "home" to the students.

LESSON TEN: DAYS 21-22

OBJECTIVES

1. Enrichment program

Skills

1. To learn to visualize what the culture of the work of art might be even though it is stripped of all culture when it is displayed in a museum.

IMPLEMENTATION

A trip to the Ewing Museum, Illinois State University

The students will be asked to select one art object to sketch which they believe they can add the masquerade to when they get home.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Students will view the museum display and sketch an art object.

When the students return to the art room the next day, they will draw the masquerade surrounding that object from their own imaginations.

LESSON ELEVEN: DAY 23

OBJECTIVES

1. To give the art show an African cultural flavor, we will have African music during the showing and all projects will be designed so that they can be worn, carried, or used as well as displayed.

Skills

1. To learn to adapt an art project so that it can be displayed or used in a masquerade.

IMPLEMENTATION

These concepts will be discussed so that the students understand once again that their projects will be their own and not a copy:
Artists are a product of their time,
Artists are a product of their culture
Artists' personalities are revealed by their art works.

Students will be asked to consider the three drawing assignments they have completed in the light of the project that they have in mind. How can these projects be utilized in a ritual such as Africans might perform. How can you best alter your choice of idea to suit the medium and the masquerade we plan to make of our art show this year. Make some sketches which show the changes you plan to incorporate or additions which would enhance your display (if you are planning a sculpture or mask, plan a costume to go with it--tie-dye? If you are planning a weaving or batik, plan to make it wearable).

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

View some slides of African ritual costumes and of the clothing of Africa. "Cloth-making in Sierra Leone" - 32 slides and/or "West African Dress" - 40 slides.

STUDENTS WILL CHOOSE THEIR MAJOR PROJECT

EVALUATION

The post-test about Africa will be given at the end of this period. The pre-test will be handed back to the students. Discussion will follow.

SCULPTURE AND/OR TEXTILE UNIT

GRADE: High School - Art II

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVE

During the unit, the student will be able to design and complete, in approximately ten weeks, at least one large finished project or two to three smaller projects. The students will be able to choose projects from the following areas: macrame, rugmaking, weaving, batik, stitchery, wood sculpture, and metal sculpture. The students may work in more than one area, if time permits. The textile project may be a combination of the previously listed techniques, such as macrame and weaving, stitchery and weaving, etc. The projects will be evaluated in terms of craftsmanship, creativity, design, and method of display and must meet a minimum level of excellence, as determined by the teacher.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

During the two-week period before Christmas vacation, the students will work on tie and dye and fold-dye projects. No grade will be given for this project.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. The student will choose in which of the areas included in the unit he wishes to work and whether he wishes to complete in approximately ten weeks one large project or two to three smaller projects.

2. The student will make sketches of his ideas and designs for the textile project or sculpture project. These ideas will be discussed and must be O.K.'d by the teacher before the student begins working on the project. However, the student does not necessarily have to "stick to" his original idea after beginning his project. The student's sketches should include the approximate size of the finished piece, the colors to be used, the materials to be used, the design of the textile project, and the use or purpose.

3. The student will complete, in approximately ten weeks, at least one large finished project or two to three smaller projects.

4. The student will participate in a group evaluation following the unit and will vote on the four most successful projects from the three Art II classes. The student will evaluate these in terms of craftsmanship, creativity, design, and method of display.

5. The student will participate in the art show to be given in the spring.

STRATEGY

A preview of what will be included in the unit will be given to the students in the form of bulletin boards which show examples from magazines of macrame, stitchery, tie and dye, batik, weaving, rugmaking, and sculpture projects. A formal introduction to the skills unit will be given to the class using the "How to do it" film strips we have on each.

The objectives of the lesson will be stated, as well as how the projects will be evaluated. Following this presentation, the students will be able to more closely examine the books on display. Before beginning on the textile projects, each student will discuss his ideas and design with the teacher. These ideas must be O.K.'d by the teacher. However, it will be stressed that the students do not have to "stick to" their original idea too closely. The students will be divided into groups based on their choice of project and demonstrations on each project will be given to these students. Following the demonstrations, the students will begin working on their projects. During the unit, the teacher will be available to answer questions, make suggestions, and assist the students with their projects.

EVALUATION

The projects will be evaluated by the teacher in terms of craftsmanship, creativity, design, and method of display. During a group critique, the students will also evaluate these projects and will choose the four most successful projects from the three classes.

LESSON TWELVE: ART PRACTICUM

OBJECTIVES

1. **By studying African culture we can understand that a work of art has different realities; one we can see, another we can feel, and still another which is the inner life of the art creation.**

2. **To learn Africa from an "inside" view by actually attempting to create an art project which can be used in a cultural sense as well as displayed for its aesthetic sense.**

Skills

1. **To learn new skills, weaving, warping, stitchery techniques, quilting, applique, reverse applique, batik, tie-dye, trapunto, tapestry weaving, sculpting, sand casting, polishing and the like.**

2. **To realize the effort involved in handcrafting in some of the oldest ways known to mankind.**

IMPLEMENTATION

Students will spend ten weeks crafting their art projects. When they are finished we will have an art show. We will include music and dance in this show and try to give cultural context to our art projects.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Students will devise new ways to display their art projects by wearing them or carrying them or in some other way giving them cultural context.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnheim, Rudolf, Art and Visual Perception, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1974.

An important book for teachers. It discusses the growth of perception from childhood to adult.

Bohannan, Paul and Philip Curtin, Africa and Africans, The Natural History Press, Garden City, N.Y., 1971

A general history of Africa recommended by the African Studies Program of the University of Illinois.

Cary, Joyce, Art and Reality, Harper and Brothers, N.Y., 1958.

A simple direct personal account of his attitudes--well illustrated. The last part is literary criticism.

Chase, Pattie with Mimi Dolbier, The Contemporary Quilt, E. P. Dutton, N.Y., 1978.

A collection of pictures of modern quilts some of which show marked African art influences.

Davidson, Basil, The African Past, Little Brown and Co., 1964.

A general history of the civilizations in Africa starting with what he calls the grand period (600-1600 A.D.). Such empires as Ghana, Mali, Kanem-Bornu, Songhay and Housa states are discussed. The two large periods of Central-Southern Africa, 12th century Zimbabwe and 15th century Monomotopa of the Karanga people under the Rozwi kings are covered. The Swahili civilization of the East coast and the city of Kilwa is described along with Engaruka, an iron age town in the Rift valley. Al Masudi's 10th century journal and the influence of the Arabs along with the introduction of their written language is discussed. The ancient civilizations of Punt and Kush, the cities of Meroe, Timbuktu, and Djenne are described: a good general source book.

Fagg, William, Miniature Wood Carvings, New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1970.

There are pictures of these small works which are housed in museums with a description of them and an indication of the culture they come from. A sterile display as they do not include dance, music, or ritual.

Fagg, William, Tribes and Forms in African Art, Tudor Publishing Co., N.Y., 1965.

Fagg is careful to point out what he means by Tribes, "... a society, an exclusive in group which uses art among many other means to express its internal solidarity and self-sufficiency and conversely its difference from all others." The book is divided into a catalogue of representative art works with descriptions of these works which help identify them by ethnic group. Photographs of museum displays.

Fraser, Douglas, African Art as Philosophy, Interbook, 545 Eighth Ave., N.Y., 1974.

This is a unique approach to African art. Instead of an "aesthetic display" as in museums or an analytic anthropological display, this book attempts to interpret the art as philosophical observations about the nature of the world.

Hoover, Louis F., ed., African Art, Illinois State University, no date.

This is a catalogue evidently used in conjunction with the work permanently housed on the Illinois State University campus. It purports to illustrate the whole collection. The collection seems extensive enough to make a field trip to the campus worth while.

Jager, E. J. de, Contemporary African Art in South Africa, C. Struik (PTY) LTD, Cape Town, 1973.

The themes for modern art in Africa are discussed: culture, daily life, and the dilemma of industrialization. The rest of the book is devoted to individual artists and their works in chalk, ink, lino cuts, bronze, wood, oil, watercolor. I was especially struck by the liquid steel sculpture of Lucas Sithole "Wounded Buffalo"...Tremendous power in the lowered head, twisted body and braced rear legs!

Kimble, George H. T., Tropical Africa, N.Y. 20th Century Fund, 1960, Doubleday, Anchor Books 1962.

The first volume is recommended by Paul Bohannan and Philip Curtin. It concerns geography. The second volume on social problems and social environment "has not been well received."

Laude, Jean, African Art of the Dogon, The Viking Press, N.Y., N.Y., 1973.

A collection of pictures of the art and culture surrounding the Dogan, a cliff dwelling culture isolated from western civilization until recent times, is presented in this book. The text describes myths and history, and art mediums and styles as well as ritual uses. Since the art is not isolated from the rest of the culture it is an especially useful book.

Laye, Camara, The Dark Child, Farrar Straus and Giroux, N.Y., 1954.

This is a biography of a young African told with sensitivity. This book is recommended by the African Studies Program of the University of Illinois.

Lommel, Andreas, Masks, Their Meaning and Function, McGraw-Hill Book Co., N.Y., 1972.

This is a beautifully illustrated book whose text describes the use of the masks. The pictures are, however, out of the context of the culture as they are photographs of the museum masks in that setting.

Meilach, Dona Z., Contemporary Art with Wood, Crown Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1978.

A collection of pictures of modern wood sculpture some showing the influence of African art. Chapters are also devoted to instruction of the wood carver.

Meilach, Dona Z., Contemporary Batik and Tie-Dye, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1978.

A collection of pictures of works of traditional and modern batik, an introduction to the history of batik and a good deal of instruction for the batik artist are included in this book.

Meilach, Dona Z., Soft Sculpture, Crown Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1974.

The history of soft sculpture, a collection of pictures of modern works as well as instruction in soft sculpture are included in this book.

Murphy, E. Jefferson, The Bantu Civilization of Southern Africa, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., N.Y., 1974.

This book traces the migration south from Sub-Saharan West Africa of the Bantu-speaking peoples. It discusses the Machili, an iron-using people who are thought to be the ancestors of the Bantu speaking peoples. It discusses the early writer-travelers, Al-Masudi who wrote during the 10th century and Ibn-Battuta who visited East Africa in 1331. The Gokomere culture is discussed along with a similar culture called Ziva on the Rhodesian-Mozambique border. The ruins of Zimbabwe and Mapungubue are described.

Murphy, E. Jefferson, History of African Civilization, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., N.Y., 1972.

A general book discussing the ancient cultures and kingdoms in which he postulates that only the Shona nation produced a state-empire in the same league with Kongo, Luba and Sudanic states due to the relative recency of the Bantu migration. A section on great men of African history such as Affonso I, Mansa Musa, Askia Muhammad, Osei Tutu and Usman dan Fodio were discussed as anti-colonial rulers.

Murphy, E. Jefferson and Harry Stein, Teaching Africa Today, Citation Press, N.Y., 1973.

Recommended by the African Studies Program of the University of Illinois.

Riviere, Marceau, African Masterpieces from the French Collections, Editions PHILBI, 23 rue Ste Croix-de-la-Bretonnenie, 75004 - Paris, 1975.

Segy, Ladislas, African Sculpture Speaks, Da Capo Press, Inc., 227 W. 17th St., N.Y., N.Y., 1975.

Segy discusses the meaning and uses of African art, the content of African art, the impact upon western civilization of African art and the style regions. As a collector and critic Segy's viewpoint may leave something to be desired.

Sieber, Roy, African Textiles and Decorative Arts, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, N.Y., N.Y., 1972..

A collection of pictures of African arts with a description of the cultural context of the pieces.

Sommer, Elyse and Rene Breskin Adams, Pillow Making as Art and Craft, Crown Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1978.

A collection of pictures of modern pillows with techniques, design inspirations, and functional innovations is included in this book.

Van der Post, Laurens, The Lost World of the Kalahari, William Morrow and Co., N.Y., 1958.

Describes an expedition into the desert in search of the Bushman. It gives some Bushman history. The painted rocks are described which may be as old as 8000 BC or before. Laurens finds parallels in the paintings of the Bushman, the ancient Egyptians, the painters of the Dordogne and the cave painters of the Iberian Peninsula.

Willett, Frank, African Art, London , Thames and Hudson, 1970.

A complete easy-to-read introduction to African art from the cultural context view. Recommended by the African Studies Program, University of Illinois.

Willett, Frank Ife in the History of West African History, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., Great Britain, 1967.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ADDITIONS

Achebe, Chinua, Things Fall Apart, Fawcett Crest, N.Y., 1959.

Barraclough, Geoffrey, ed., The Times Atlas of World History, Hammond Inc., Maplewood, N.Y., 07040, 1978.

This is a beautiful, detailed, full-of-maps book of Africa and the rest of the world. It is in historical order showing a diverse collection of visual information.

Courlander, Harold, A Treasury of African Folklore, Crown Publishers, Inc., N.Y., 1975.

The oral literature, traditions, myths, legends, epics, tales, recollections, wisdom, sayings, and humor of Africa.

Dendel, Esther Warner, African Fabric Crafts, Taplinger Publishing Co., N.Y., 1974.

Fraser, Douglas and Herbert M. Cole, African Art and Leadership, Univ. of Wis. Press, Madison, Wis., 1972.

Gardi, Rene, African Crafts and Craftsmen, Van Nostrand Reihold Co., N.Y.,1969.

The first book I have found that explained and pictured the technique of Bronze casting--enclosing the scrap metal in a hollow ball of clay which is attached to the mold after the wax has been melted out. This ball is allowed to dry and then turned ball down into the charcoal fire. The melted metal flows directly into the casting when the mold is brought out of the fire and reversed. See pp. 62-74. The melted Bronze thus never is exposed to the air. Good technical explanations but full of pejorative language.

Horton, Robin, Kalabari Sculpture, The Nigerian National Press Limited, APAPA, 1965.

Kultermann, Udo, New Directions in African Architecture, George Braziller, Inc., 1969.

Teilhet, Jehanne, ed., Dimensions of Black, La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, Calif. 1970.

Thompson, Robert Farris, African Art in Motion, Univ. of Calif. Press, Los Angeles, 1974.

PERIODICALS

"Africa in the Curriculum: A Symposium," Social Education Vol. 35 (2), p. 138-232, National Council for the Social Studies, Feb., 1971.

Collins, H. T. ed., and staff of the School Services Division of the African-American Institute, "Are You Going to Teach About Africa?" African-American Institute, 1970.

Blumenthal, Susan, "The World's Best Traveled Art," Africa Report, Jan.-Feb., 1974, 0.4-10.

Clark, Leon E., "Starting with the Arts," Africa Report, Vol. 18 (1), pp. 38-40.

Hall, Susan J., "Africa in U. S. Educational Materials," School Service Division, 833 United Nations Plaza, N.Y., N.Y., 1976.

"Interview: Amir I.M. No," Africa Report, May-June 1974, pp. 12-16, 48.

Rich, Evelyn Jones, "Mind Your Language," Africa Report, Vol. 19 (5), pp. 47-49.

Thompson, Robert Farris, "The Sign of the Divine King," African Arts, Vol. IV, #3.

FILMS

Africa Dances - 30 minutes - color

A filming of a live performance for a U. S. audience here in the U. S. Alistar Cook narrates. After a slow start, the dancers really move! One of the African students said they were "showing off."

The Bend of the Niger - 2 reels, 25 minutes - color

The cultural traditions of the Bambara, Bororo, Dendi and Dogon peoples living along the great bend or turn of the Niger River. Part II has a good sequence on a blacksmith and a wood carver.

Available free of charge from African Studies Program, University of Illinois.

Benin Kingship Ritual - 30 minutes - color

This is an older film although Part III, The Iron and Part IV, The Blessing could be shown.

Available free of charge from African Studies Program, University of Illinois.

Film Strips

African Cliff Dwellers, The Dogon People of Mali - 2 color sound film strips - 3 wall posters - teacher's guide, E.M.C. Corp.

OVERHEAD PROJECTOR

Sub-Saharan Africa - eleven themes each with 4 to 8 overlays, Keuffel and Esser Co., 300 Adams St., Hoboken, H.J., 07030 (prices range from $3.25--$9.25).

MAPS AND CHARTS

Ethiopia Picture Set, 12 charts, $3.50, D.C.A. Educational Products, Inc., 4065 Stenton Ave., Philadelphia, Pa., 19144.

Songhai and Benin, $3.50, same as above.

Great West African Civilizations, large wall chart 30" by 40", $1.95. African Heritage, Social Studies School Services 10,000 Culver Blvd., Culver City, Calif.

SLIDES

[1]African Jewelry Making - 30 slides

Slides 1-4 are of gold pieces of jewelry, 5-23 show soldering using the blow pipe method, 24-30 pictures of beautiful beadwork.

[1]Benin Kingship Ritual - 22 slides

Beautiful red robed chief in slide number 12.

[1]Cloth-making in Sierra Leone - 32 slides

Make sure to send for this slide set.

[1]Contemporary African Artists - 32 slides

Several works of each of the following artists are shown: Alexander Boghossian, E. O. Darty, Ben Enwonwu, Akinola Lasekan, Godfrey Okili, Pili Pili Mulongya, G. O. Talaki and Solomon Wangboje.

"The Creative Past," Art of Africa - 77 slides

Collected by William Fagg with discussion of how made and used. Extension Service, National Gallery of Art, Wash., D. C. 20565.

[1] Houses Western and Southern Africa - 44 slides

A brief survey of the diversity of rural and urban housing in 5 African countries.

[1]Innovative African Artists - 34 slides

The sculpture of Thomas Mukarobjwa (Rhodesia), prints of Bruce Onobrakpeya (Nigeria), bead paintings of Jomoh Buraimoh (Nigeria), and aluminum counter-repousse panels of Asiru Olatunde (Nigeria), and the artists at work are shown.

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[1]Available free of rental charge from the African Studies Program, University of Illinois.

[1]West African Dress - 40 slides

Different methods of making, decorating and wearing cloth.

[1]Yoruba Pottery - 42 slides

The processes of making two types of pottery in Nigeria are shown in detail.

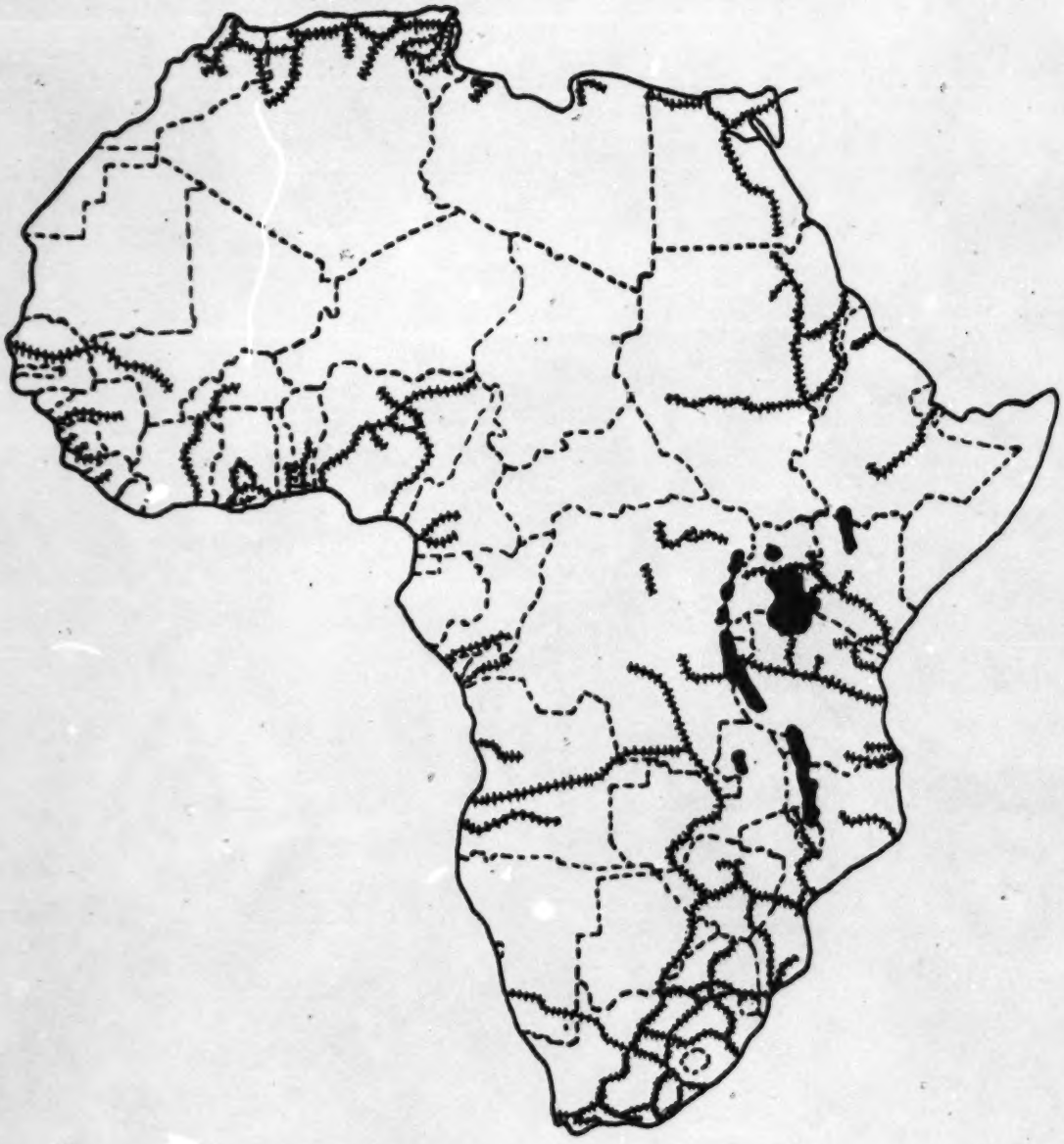
PHOTOGRAPHS

African Art - 150 prints

Series N, Sect. 1. $3.50, University Prints, 15 Brattle Street, Cambridge, Mass., 02138.

[1]Available free of rental charge from the African Studies Program, University of Illinois.

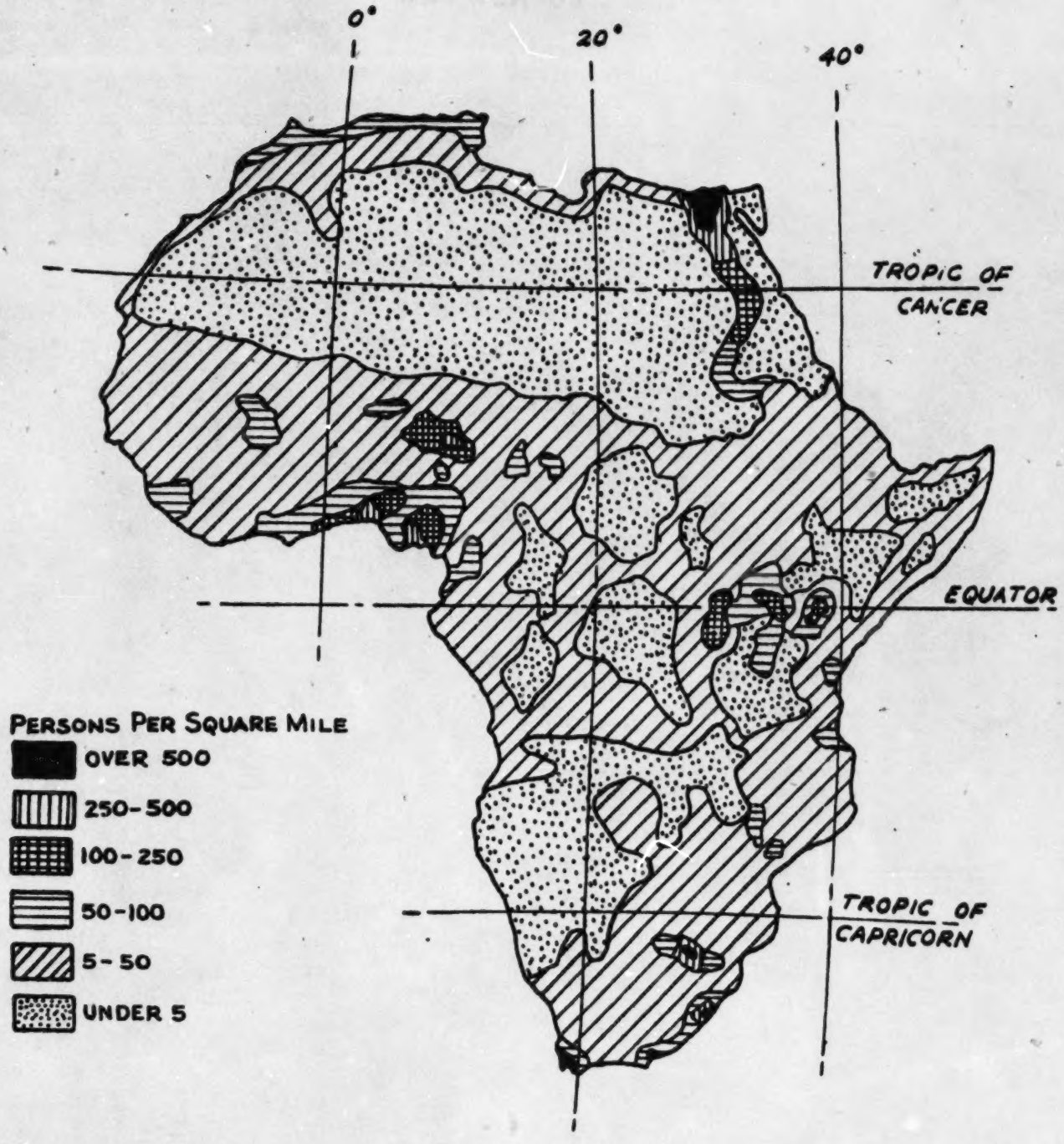
APPENDIX I - MAPS



RAILWAY SYSTEMS

H444-25

© Denoyer Geppert Co



POPULATION DENSITY

H444-13

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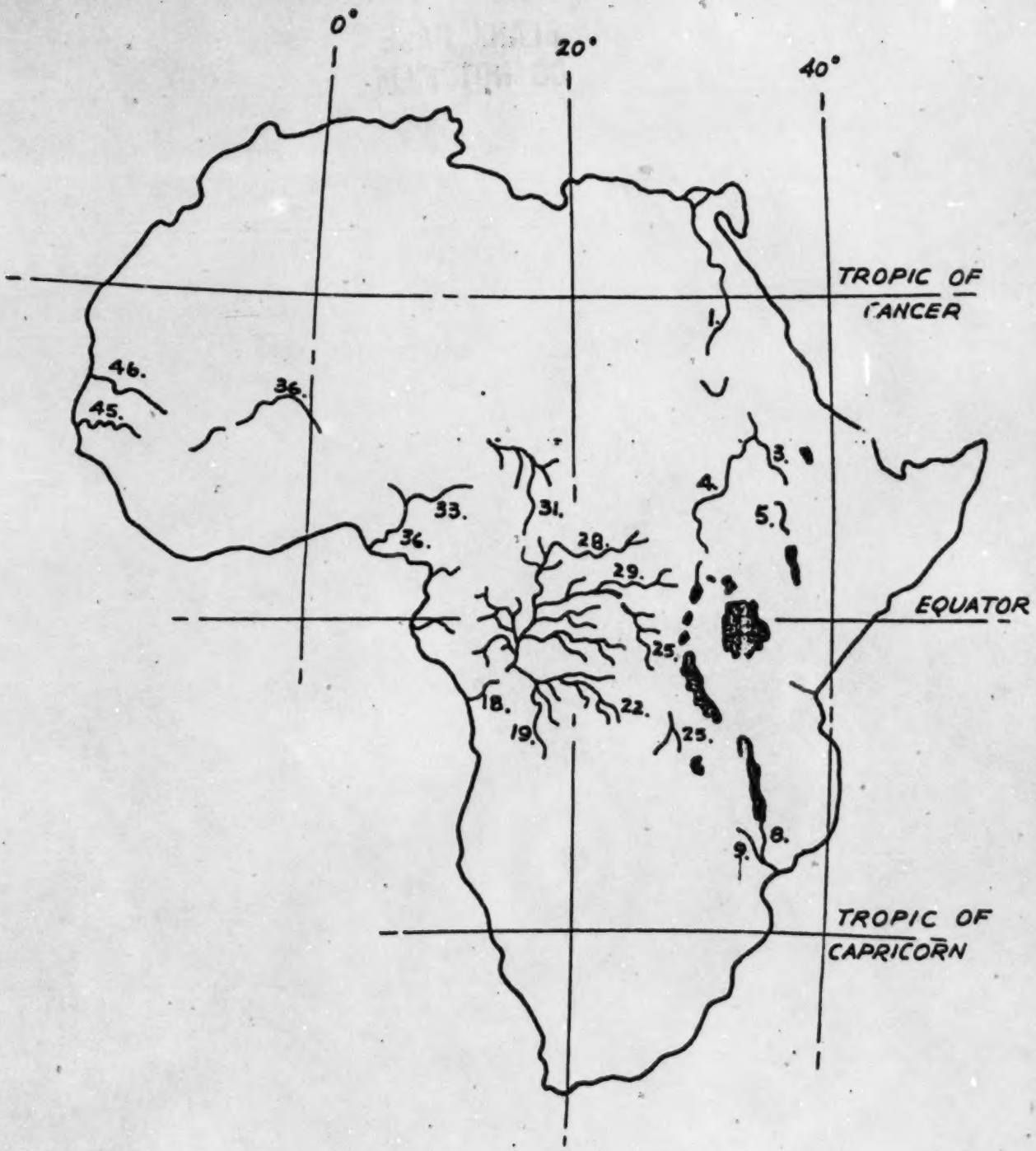

NAVIGABLE WATERWAYS

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APPENDIX II

"Film Guide, The Bend of the Niger"

African Studies Program
University of Illinois
1208 West California Urbana, Illinois 61801

THE BEND OF THE NIGER
(Film Guide)

"The Bend of the Niger" was written, produced and filmed by the late Eliot Elisofon, an internationally known "Life" magazine photographer who traveled widely in Africa. Narrated by Black actor and playwright Ossie Davis, the film focuses on the cultural traditions of African peoples living along the great bend or turn of the Niger River as it flows first northward and then south through the modern nations of Mali and Niger.

The film opens with a traditional griot or bard who accompanies a singer on his stringed kora. The Bambara (or Bamana) people are visited first in their homeland along the upper or western reaches of the Niger. Some scenes of farming and food preparation are shown in addition to an informal dance session and a sequence on weaving. The dance of the chi wara (tyi wara) highlights this section; the carved chi wara, reminiscent of the West African antelope, is one of the best known to Westerners of African sculptural forms.

Leaping eastward, the film contrasts the agricultural lifestyle of the Bambara to that of the nomadic Bororo, a branch of the well-known Fulani herdsmen. The importance of Islam in the area is introduced with a scene of an eight-year-old Hausa child who studies the Quran. The desert-dwelling Tuareg are shown, and a series of sequences suggests the intermixing of these various ethnic groups: market scenes, festivals, and displays of equestrian skill.

Moving toward the top of the Niger bend, the film explores the banks of the Niger itself, showing Dendi children swimming and playing, fishing activities, and riverside markets. Massive slabs of salt arrive along the Niger, having been transported overland from the north. The viewer moves upriver with the salt to the ancient city of Timbuktu. An excellent sequence follows showing traditional mosque architecture at Timbuktu, Mopti, and San.

A long final film section looks at the lifestyle and sculpture of the agricultural Dogon who live on the Bandiagara escarpment high above the western reaches of the Niger bend. A blacksmith and his son are followed as they carve and decorate a kanaga mask. A dance sequence shows the kanaga-type mask in action, and then the narrator discusses aesthetics and style in Dogon sculpture.

Through the color photography is excellent throughout, the film's narrative script lapses at times into inappropriate terminology and generalizations. Thus in addition to viewing "Bend of the Niger" for general content, a teacher may use it as a tool to promote critical evaluation. Students can be asked to watch for unsubstantiated claims (for example, exaggerated judgments on Dogon art) or for language pejorative to the dignity of African peoples (use of "tribe" and "primitive" for example).

A more important factor for class discussion is the film unabashed bias for "traditional" life. "Bend of the Niger" shows African culture--dance, music and the visual arts--wholly untouched by contact with the West. It closes with a strong vote of support and admiration for African peoples who retain "tradition" in face of pressures to change and modernize. Obviously there are modern cities

and Western-style institutions in the countries where the film was made. A teacher should raise the question of what will or should happen over time to the lifestyles and the arts the film depicts.

BACKGROUND READING:

BAMBARA --

P. J. Imperato, "Dance of the Tyi Wara," African Arts, IV, 1 (autumn 1970)

P. J. Imperato, "Bamana and Maninka Covers and Blankets," African Arts, VII, 3 (spring 1974)

BORORO AND TUAREG --

P. J. Imperato, "Wool Blankets of the Peul of Mali," African Arts, VI, 3 (spring 1973)

N. Mickelsen, "Tuareg Jewelry," African Arts, IX, 2 (winter 1976)

MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE --

L. Prussin, "Architecture of Islam in West Africa," African Arts, I, 2 (winter 1968)

DOGON --

M. Griaule, Conversations with Ogotemmeli. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

J. Laude, African Art of the Dogon. New York: Viking, 1973.

APPENDIX III

Description of the Primordial Couple

The Primordial Couple is seated on an imago nundi stool supported by four figures. The man's right arm is around the woman's neck and his hand touches her right breast; his left hand is on his genital. The woman's hands rest on her thighs. He has an empty quiver on his back and she has a child on hers. He has a trapezoid-shaped beard, she a labret in the shape of a truncated cone with a copper ring around its base. The woman wears four horseshoe-shaped copper rings on each ear (four is the number of femininity) and the man has three rings in each of his (the number of masculinity). Both have arrow-shaped noses that continue the crest of the headgear. The four caryatid figures, arms at their sides and hands crossed below the abdomen, are in a completely different style.

This piece poses a number of questions. The shapes of the noses and ears are more or less identical with those of the nummo head where it is serpent-shaped, the mouth wide, the ears shaped like horseshoes. The presence of the quiver places the man in the category of hunter or warrior, and the beard identifies him as a chieftain. The presence of the copper-ringed labret in the woman's lip is more difficult to interpret. This motif is not exclusive to the sculpture of the Dogon country; it occurs on Baule sculpture and masks, on soapstone figurines of the Kissi, and on ancestor figures of the oron-Ibibio. In the twisted form in which it appears on the couple in the Barnes Foundation, the motif is analogous to the false beard on Pharaonic masks that identified the dead sovereign with Osiris. Without pressing the point, we may note that here at least are two elements common to Pharaonic and Dogon sculpture: the arm around the woman's neck and the labret similar in shape to the false beard of the Pharaoh. Moreover, the dismemberment of the nummo and the scattering of its body over the earth recall the fate of Osiris.

The headgear worn by both man and woman is similar to that still worn by the Fulani or Peuls, whom we know to have been antagonists of the Dogon. The edge of the seat is not decorated with a herringbone pattern and thus does not partake of the ancestral Lebe. Thus, this couple sitting on the imago mundi probably testifies to the Peul occupation, or more precisely to a population that sprang from the alliance between the warrior Peuls and another people, possibly blacksmiths. This alliance, in order to be made concrete and maintained, was probably legitimized by registering, the benefit of the conquered people, its eloquent and authoritarian image in the mythic structure of the Dogon country. We might add that the style of the caryatid figures is identical with that of the forty-four figures in relief on the granary shutter (no. 74) which can be assumed to be an index of the forty-four peoples descended from Mande. Wood. Height 29 inches.

Laude, Jean, African Art of the Dogon, The Viking Press, New York, 1973. Plate number 37.

APPENDIX IV

Kanaga Mask, spirals and checkerboards

SPIRAL/CHECKERBOARD

A prominent duality expressed in Dogon thought, ritual, and material culture is the dichotomy between the qualities and types of movement indicated on the one hand by spiral forms and on the other by checkerboards. This suggests that curvilinearity is associated with aspects of the supernatural, whereas grid systems are used to represent the products and actions of human beings and the basic order of human life.

THE SPIRAL

Amma, the otiose deity who created the mythical and human worlds, is the ultimate spiritual force in Dogon religious thought. Amma is formless; he is thought to be creative energy rather than a being. This is shown by the Dogon use of a verb, boy, rather than a noun, to denote their paramount deity. Although Amma cannot be represented visually be a particular human or animal image, the Dogon do depict the deity's creative essence by a diagram of a spiral line marked by a series of points which designate the things created by Amma.

Dogon myth describes an earlier era when supernatural creatures descended to the earth. Interaction with the earth produced human life and culture. The principal Dogon spirits are the eight Nummos, depicted as serpentine creatures with fluid, green bodies and jointless limbs, whose essence is water, the formless substance which is the life-force of the human world. The seventh Nummo, the principal culture-bearer, becomes a large serpent. When he is resurrected, he becomes Lebe. The Lebe serpent and his human priest, the Hogon, are the leaders of a present day cult directed towards the preservation of the world' life-force and agricultural fertility. Since the Nummo's serpentine form recalls the undulating flow of water, it seems that the Dogon represent their primary mythical spirits by curvilinear forms and movement, characteristic of water.

The Dogon believe that the creation of the first Nummo pair, as well as the succeeding creation of the first human pair, is re-enacted in the present with each human conception. They envision both mythic and human creation as a process in which the male seed encircles the womb with a spiral motion. To the Dogon, this act symbolically unites the spiritual world, embodied in the watery nature of the womb, with the earthly realm, represented by the male seed which is a product of the human body, and thus of the earth.

All of the principal aspects of Dogon culture and social organization are also thought to have been engendered by supernatural intervention in the form of three successive transmissions of the Spoken Word. It is possible to show that in Dogon myth, the transference of the Spoken Word (supernatural) to mankind (human) is expressed by transformation from curvilinear and spiral qualities to grid-like structures. According to Dogon mythology, the transference of the first Word was limited to the supernatural world. The power of the Word, embodied in a spiral, entered the earth's womb. There, the seventh Nummo learned its meaning. With the knowledge contained in this spiral-form Word, the Nummo was ready to impart the second Word to all of mankind.

By analogy, the spiral coils of the thread of the Spoken Word were ordered into a system of horizontals and verticals in the warp and the weft of the woven material which the seventh Nummo revealed to man.

THE SPIRAL AND THE CHECKERBOARD IN DOGON RITUAL LIFE

The spiral or curvilinear properties of the supernatural world and the horizontal/vertical systems which characterize the Human world form an important duality which is recurrently expressed in Dogon mythology. This duality also seems to structure Dogon ritual activities. For example, painting representational designs or geometric symbols on shrine facades often accompanies the ritual ceremonies of the Dogon. Two images frequently included in this wealth of symbolic ornamentation are the checkerboard and a serpentine form or zig-zag line which sometimes appears in a series of vertical registers. To the Dogon, the checkerboard is a symbolic diagram of the ideal human order, as well as a symbolic representation of human culture; the spiral or zig-zag depicts the form and path of the mythical Nummos embodied in the terrestial waterways.

The plan of the totemic shrine, Manda d'Orosongo, and its environs, is a striking example of the duality between spiral or curvilinear properties and horizontal and vertical systems merging to structure the forms of Dogon ritual life. Within this ritual area, there are essentially two units, the ceremonial precinct defined by the curvilinear enclosing wall and the priest's house, i.e. a rectilinear structure. This duality of forms is again expressed in the juxtaposition of the principal altar, a curving shape, to the adjoining rectilinear platform used by the priest. Those structures associated with the priest, the representative of the human sphere in all communications with the supernatural world, are rectilinear and are defined by horizontals and verticals, whereas those forms describing the ceremonial grounds and altars are curvilinear.

THE CHECKERBOARD

The revelation of the Spoken Word to mankind had important ramifications because it began a chain of mythical events which created the principal items of Dogon culture, such as weaving, smithing, agriculture, and house building. In order to make use of this new cultural knowledge, human beings had to conform to the horizontal and vertical structures of the earthly world. The Dogon believe that prior to the coming of culture, human beings had flexible, jointless limbs like the Nummos. Then man received the most basic tool, his joints, which enabled him to work more effectively at these new cultural tasks. Thereafter, the sharp angles of the joints of the human body, which form horizontal and vertical junctions, differentiated men from the curvilinear, undulating form of their mythical culture heroes, the Nuumos.

It can be shown that when these supernatural gifts of culture were accepted by mankind, they were also translated into the horizontal and vertical systems which structure the human world. The process and products of weaving constitute the most striking representation of the grid system symbolic of the human order. The Dogon loom consists of four vertical stakes connected by four horizontal bars. The weaver is enclosed by this horizontal/

vertical structure while he is creating one. An important product of this craft is the pall used to cover the dead; it is composed of alternate blue and white squares woven by an equal number (eighty) of warp and weft movements. The Dogon visualize the act of making funeral cloth as a symbolic diagram of the ideal human order because the eight horizontal and vertical members of the loom are thought to correspond to the eight original Dogon ancestors, and the eighty horizontal and vertical movements of the warp and the weft are likened to the subsequent multiplication of these original eight to form the Dogon community.

The Dogon compare the process of weaving to the process of cultivation; the to-and-fro movements of the shuttle on the warp are thought to parallel the to-and-fro movements of the peasant on his fields. This is because the land is cultivated according to a system in which the farmer moves from east to west, and then, from west to east along a vertical axis oriented north. Like the funeral cloth, the plowed fields of the Dogon resemble a checkerboard pattern because the land is cultivated by sections composed of eight squares in which each square is surrounded on all sides by an embankment of earth.

Douglas Fraser, African Art as Philosophy, Interbook, 545 Eighth Avenue, New York, 1974, pp. 13-19.